Field Reports

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THE FIRST JAPANESE-CONGOLESE MOKELE-MBEMBE EXPEDITIONS

TOKUHARU TAKABAYASHI
3-13-20 Atago, Niiza, Saitama, 352 Japan

INTRODUCTION

Interest has been generated by reports of a large, unknown animal supposedly inhabiting the swamps of the Congo Basin. Called Mokele-Mbembe locally, descriptions from sightings have suggests a morphology similar to that of the sauropod dinosaurs of the Mesozoic (Roy P. Mackal, J. Richard Greenwell, and M. Justin Wilkinson, 1982, The Search for Evidence of Mokele-Mbembe in the People's Republic of the Congo, *Cryptozoology,* Vol. 1: 62–72; Herman Regusters, 1982, *Final Report of the Regusters African Congo Expedition*).

On March 10, 1988, the author and 10 others arrived in Brazzaville, People's Republic of the Congo, with the purpose of investigating the possible existence of this animal. Tomio Nonoyama, Kohji Minaguchi, and the author had visited Impfondo in 1986, and had obtained useful information from missionary Eugene Thomas. A Japanese expedition was then conducted in September, 1987, and included Hideyuki Takano and Tohru Mukai, from the Waseda University Expedition Club. That expedition visited Epena, Boha, Djeke, Minganga, Mokengui, and the Mondongouma River, and included Marcellin Agnagna and Jose Bourge Djoni from the Congolese Ministry of Forest Economy.

The new expedition, under the leadership of Takano, left Brazzaville for the northern Likouala region on March 22, 1988.

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The expedition consisted of the following persons: the author, Tokuharu Takabayashi; Tomio Nonoyama, a naturalist; student members of the Waseda University Expedition Club: Hideyuki Takano, Yohsuke Takahashi, Toshiki Murakami, Takuya Kaneko, Hajime Tobe, Tohru Mukai, Michiaki Funakoshi, Kenichi Moriyama, and Osamu Tamura. Marcellin Agnagna, Dieudonné (DeDe) Moubiala, and Jean Claude Ngamokouba, all of the Ministry of Forest Economy, represented the Congolese Government.

We departed from Impfondo to Epena, located on the Likouala-aux-Herbes River. Our first leg took us down the Likouala-aux-Herbes River by motorized dugout to Boha, which took about 6 hours. A meeting was conducted with the Boha village elders, who demanded a substantial fee for our expedition to gain access to Lake Telle. After reaching an agreement, our team was ready to leave with 35 village porters on March 28. Before we embarked, a traditional ceremony was held in front of the chief's home.

It took us 3 days to hike the 50+ kilometers through the swamp forest to Lake Telle. The last 3 kilometers took 5 hours of strenuous effort, as it involved slogging through mud. We arrived at Lake Telle on March 30. A base camp was established at the northern end of the lake, near an old pygmy village, and a subcamp was set up at Bogongo, at the lake's east-southeast edge. Unlike the surrounding swamp-forest, Lake Telle provided an unobstructed view of several kilometers (Fig. 1).

Fieldwork consisted of daylight surface surveillance, using 35mm cameras with telephoto lenses, all-night surface surveillance using a Starlight scope, and sonar scans from a rubber boat. Unfortunately, our sonar unit broke down after only 2 days of operation.

Although our stay at Lake Telle was during the dry season, very rainy days occurred. The average base camp temperature was about 25°C, with a maximum of 32°C (at 2 p.m.), and a minimum of 19°C (midnight to 3 a.m.).

Tsetse flies were encountered on both the edges of the lake and its surface. There were few mosquitos at the camp. Many animals were observed. Our main diet consisted of crocodile, python, turtle, wild pig, and monkey.

During the early morning of April 5, two Boa villagers, Isaac and Double, reportedly observed an unidentified object in the lake. They had taken a dugout and gone to the western side of the lake to hunt. It had been raining, but the rain had stopped, and mist remained on some parts of the lake's surface. After some time, they returned to base camp shouting for Marcellin Agnagna. They said a large black object was floating at the center of the lake. However, heavy mist prevented us from seeing anything, even with the aid of binoculars.

On April 28, expedition members Nonoyama, DeDe, and the author set out in the rubber boat to explore the tributaries or *molibos* of the lake. On April 29, we arrived at the Oumé *molibo,* which local natives say is connected

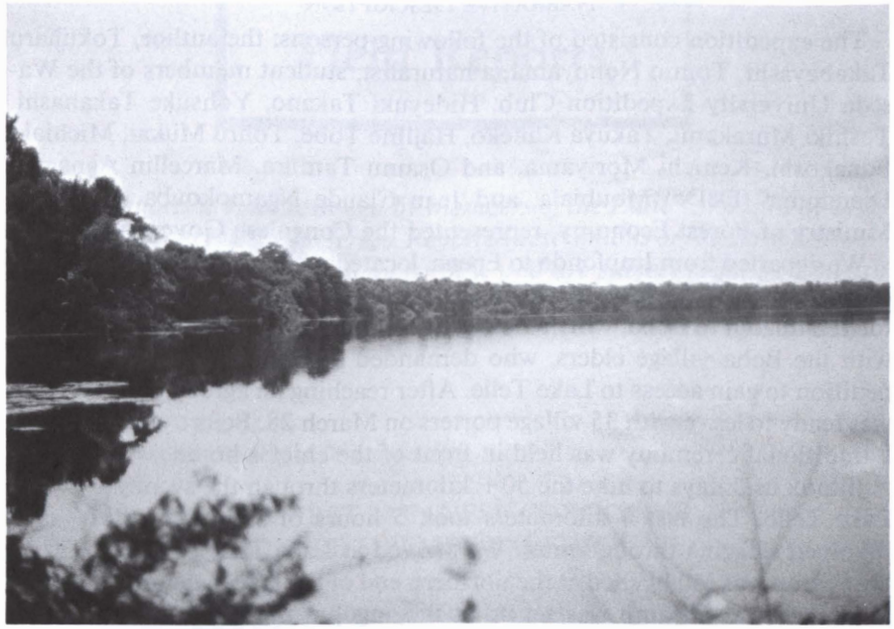

FIG. 1.—A panoramic view of Lake Telle taken from the expedition's base camp.

to the Bai River (Fig. 2). The water was very murky, and only about 1 meter deep. Floating grass covered much of the surface, clogging our passage. We paddled downstream toward the Bai River, observing as we went along. Eventually, DeDe warned that it would be dangerous to go further, so we returned to base camp.

On May 4, after a 35-day stay at the lake, the team returned to Boha along the same route it had followed to the lake. Discussions with villagers at Boha and Djeke confirmed previous reports of Mokele-Mbembe sightings.

RESULTS

We obtained much information on Mokele-Mbembe from villagers. Although there was no evidence of the molombo plant at Lake Telle, Mokele-Mbembe is said to also eat the leaves of the mabondji tree, which never goes out of season. One of the Boha porters, who hunts at Lake Telle, claimed to have seen a Mokele-Mbembe enter the lake in February of 1988.

A Boha elder, between 70 and 80 years of age, said that he had never seen Mokele-Mbembe, but that, earlier in the century, there had been a reported killing of such a creature by pygmies in the Oumé *molibo*.

An elephant hunter at Djeke named Immanuel Mongoumela, who is known to Roy P. Mackal, said he believes Mokele-Mbembe lives in the Likouala-

FIG. 2.—The Oumé *molibo* connecting Lake Telle to the Bai River. A supposed haunt of Mokele-Mbembe.

aux-Herbes, the Bai, and the Sanga rivers. He believes it was improbable that Mokele-Mbembe could ever have lived permanently in Lake Telle. One of the Boha porters said that, when forest elephants ford rivers, they raise their trunks above the surface. This could be one explanation for some of the sightings.

Our expedition found no evidence of the existence of Mokele-Mbembe in the area. No tracks of the creature were observed. We saw many mammals (lowland gorilla, chimpanzee) and reptiles (crocodile, Nile monitor) in the lake area. We searched for Mokele-Mbembe in the tributaries (*molibos*) of the lake. No sightings nor other evidence were collected, although this did not dissuade expedition members from acknowledging the possibility that there may well be an unidentified animal living in the swamps of the Likouala region.

FUTURE PLANS

Although there are no current plans for future expeditions to the Likouala region, the author hopes to return in the future, preferably during the rainy season, particularly to the Sanga and Bai rivers, and the Oumé tributary between the Bai River and Lake Telle. Each expedition may increase the probability of the discovery of such an unknown animal.

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LCPI WORK AT LAKE CHAMPLAIN, 1988

JOSEPH W. ZARZYNSKI
P.O. Box 2134, Wilton, New York 12866, U.S.A.

INTRODUCTION

The year 1988 was highlighted by the continuation of the use of high technology equipment in both underwater exploration and surveying, and automated lake surface video surveillance by the Lake Champlain Phenomena Investigation (LCPI) in its ongoing search for evidence of "Champ," Lake Champlain's version of the Loch Ness Monster. The year 1987 had ushered in this new reliance upon more sophisticated equipment—a ROV (remotely-operated-vehicle), side-scan sonar, Loran-C, and a video digitizer computer monitoring system. More conventional forms of searching—surface surveillance with cameras and binoculars/telescope, scuba searches, and night-scope surveillance—were also conducted. This report serves as an update on the LCPI's ongoing fieldwork, and also records the reported 1988 Champ sightings in the 109-mile-long lake, located in Vermont, New York, and Quebec.

LCPI fieldwork during 1988 was primarily directed at: (1) locating a carcass of a Champ animal using side-scan sonar surveys and ROV searches; (2) continuing field tests of an experimental video digitizer computer monitoring system (VDCMS), which underwent initial testing at Lake Champlain in 1987; (3) daylight surface surveillance with cameras and binoculars/telescope from boat and shore-based sites; (4) underwater searching using scuba divers; (5) providing Champ and search procedure-related educational lessons to the crew of an Air-Sea-Rescue vessel; (6) further documentation, analysis, and publication of reported Champ sightings; (7) encouraging residents and visitors at Lake Champlain to carry cameras to possibly get photographic documentation of Champ; and (8) providing assistance to serious individuals and groups involved in Champ-related research and fieldwork.

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

LCPI conducted 41 days of fieldwork at Lake Champlain during 1988. As in 1987, donated gear and personnel helped to make the fieldwork a highly equipped expedition. Donated equipment and personnel came from: Klein Associates, Inc., Salem, New Hampshire; Kaselaan & D'Angelo Associates, Inc., Haddon Heights, New Jersey; Sea Scouts, Kearney, New Jersey; John Becker, Brooktondale, New York; Susan Schmidt, New York City; and George Zug, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Klein Associates, Inc. provided a Klein 500-kHz side-scan sonar. Martin Klein, President, and Garry Kozak, Manager, Field Operations, acted as our primary

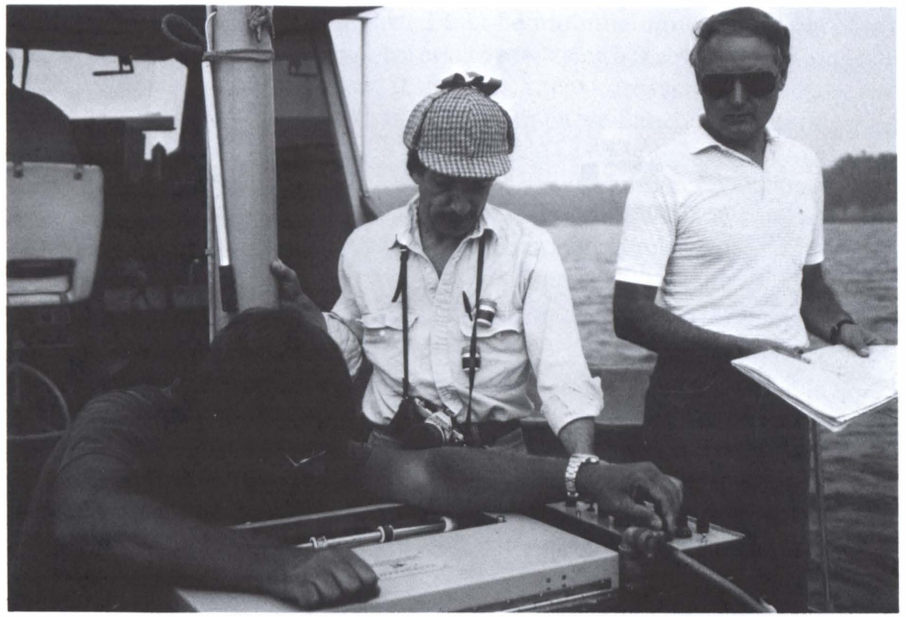

FIG. 1.—Garry Kozak (left), Martin Klein (center), and Russell Bellico observing side-scan sonar returns.

side-scan sonar operators (Fig. 1). Kaselaan & D'Angelo Associates, Inc. provided a MiniRover MK II ROV, equipped with a VHS video camera, a manipulator arm for object retrieval, and a newly fitted 35mm camera for underwater still photography. Vincent Capone, Division Manager, Marine & Aquatic Sciences, Kaselaan & D'Angelo Associates, Inc., was our ROV operator, and he also ran several shifts as side-scan sonar operator. He and Bob Gallagher, also of Kaselaan & D'Angelo Associates, Inc., were also members of our scuba team.

Captain Charles Welte donated the use of his Air-Sea-Rescue 1357 vessel, *ASR 1357*, and his Sea Scout crew. The 63-foot-long vessel was built in 1954 for the U.S. military establishment, and now functions as a training vessel for Sea Scouts based during the summer months at Plattsburgh, New York (Fig. 2). George Zug, Smithsonian Institution, acquired the use of a liquid nitrogen container to be used to hold, preserve, and transfer a small specimen sample, should a carcass of Champ be discovered. John Becker donated an ImageWise video digitizer, an Atari 1040ST computer, a Zenith Universal Infrared VCR/TV/CATV Controler, a Panasonic TV camera, a Sakata Composite monitor, and a 24 Bit I/O Board. Susan Schmidt donated night-scope gear for low visibility surveillance. M. Patram Meaney and

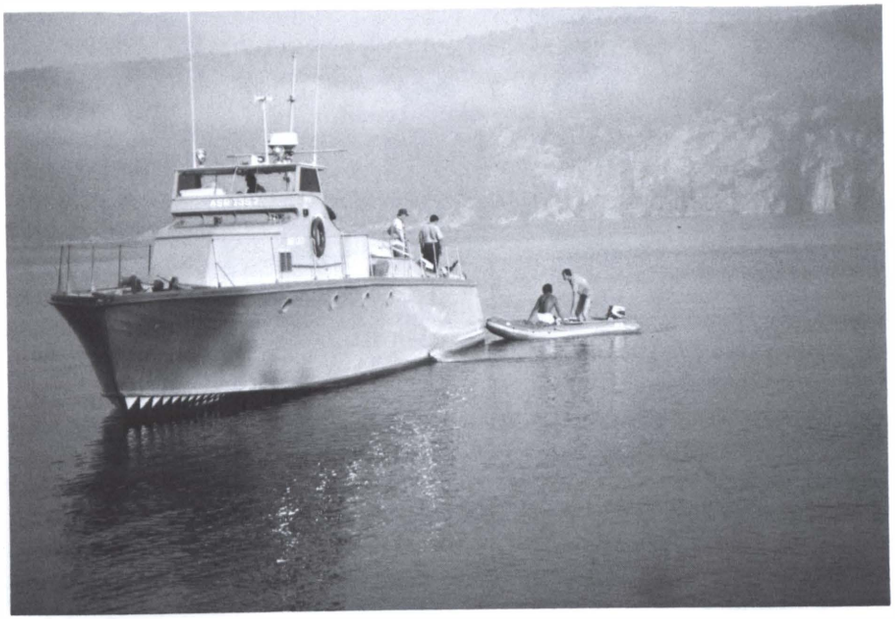

FIG. 2.—The 63-foot-long *ASR 1357* vessel and a 13-foot-long Avon inflatable used during LCPI's 1988 fieldwork at Lake Champlain.

Joseph W. Zarzynski donated various camera, video, boat, and scuba gear, plus providing lakeside housing to LCPI members.

Zarzynski participated in all 41 days of LCPI fieldwork. Others participated on the following date(s): M. Patram Meaney (April 20, May 29, June 25–30, July 1, 31, August 1–3, 5–8, 10, 16–25); Vincent Capone (June 25–26, August 6–14); Russell Bellico (July 6, 9, August 5, 7, 10, 23, 30); Garry Kozak and Martin Klein (August 10–11); Bob and Mike Gallagher (August 10–14); Bob Benway (June 11, August 2–3, September 10); Jack Sullivan (June 11, July 6, 9, August 25–26, September 10); Jerry Pepper (June 11, July 9); John Farrell (June 11, July 9, August 18–19, 30); Johnny Farrell (August 18–19); Barbara and Terry Crandall (August 8–14); Captain Dan Couture (June 11, July 9, August 30, September 10); Bill Currie (August 7–14); Judy Currie (August 8–10); Liz Meaney (August 23–25); Ted Straiton (August 19–22, September 17); John Becker (August 19–22, September 17); Dave Pitkin, Joe Citro, George Earley, and Ken Bartowski (September 17); and Captain Charles Welte, Brian Heinzmann, Michael Golan, Jeff Gregory, Robert Del Freo, Anthony Siano, and Edmund Phelan (August 7–14).

Special thanks go to Richard Smith and Richard Deuel for bringing to my attention some previously unrecorded Champ sightings. Richard Smith, an

active Champ fieldworker, reported that he mounted no major effort at the lake in 1988, instead devoting his time to preparing a research boat for 1989. Richard Deuel, an independent researcher, spent considerable time at Lake Champlain in 1988 doing shore-based lake surveillance and interviewing Champ eyewitnesses.

The 1988 LCPI fieldwork consisted of: daytime surface surveillance from boat and shore using 35mm cameras, a Super 8mm camera, a VHS video camera, telephoto lenses, camera tripods, binoculars/telescope, surveillance camera/monitor, video recorder, and computer with digitizer; nocturnal surface surveillance using a hand-held night-scope; scuba monitoring; scuba diver underwater photography; side-scan sonar; and operation of the ROV.

Lake surface surveillance was conducted primarily from Kimball Dock, Vermont. Numerous surface surveillance sessions were conducted from boats. Side-scan sonar sweeps and underwater videography/photography using the ROV were made from the *ASR 1357* vessel.

The dates of the fieldwork were: April 20, May 29, June 11, 25–30, July 1, 6, 9, 31, August 1–14, 16–26, 30, September 10, 17. Daytime surface surveillance from shore sites or boats using cameras and binoculars/telescope was conducted during all 41 days; nocturnal surface surveillance from a shore site using a night-scope was done during two nights; boat-deployed side-scan sonar was used during two days; the ROV deployed from a boat was used during three days; use of the video digitizer computer monitoring system was used during three days; and 32 scuba dives were conducted, 12 with diver(s) using a Nikonos underwater camera, and one with divers working with the ROV.

The 32 scuba dives were made as part of an underwater reconnaissance survey, to inspect and untangle the ROV cable, or to examine side-scan sonar targets. The dates of these scuba dives, the divers involved, and the type of dive were: June 11 (Benway, Pepper, Sullivan, Zarzynski, two reconnaissance dives); July 6 (Bellico, Sullivan, Zarzynski, three reconnaissance and sonar dives); July 9 (Bellico, Farrell, Pepper, Sullivan, Zarzynski, two reconnaissance dives); August 2 (Benway, Zarzynski, one reconnaissance dive); August 3 (Benway, Zarzynski, three reconnaissance dives); August 5 (Bellico, Zarzynski, one reconnaissance dive); August 7 (Capone, Zarzynski, one ROV inspection/rescue); August 9 (T. Crandall, B. Currie, Zarzynski, one reconnaissance dive); August 10 (Capone, Zarzynski, one reconnaissance dive); August 12 (T. Crandall, B. Gallagher, three Sea Scouts, Zarzynski, three reconnaissance dives); August 13 (Capone, Zarzynski, one reconnaissance dive); August 17 (Bellico, Zarzynski, one reconnaissance dive); August 19 (John Farrell, Zarzynski, three reconnaissance dives); August 23 (Bellico, Zarzynski, one reconnaissance dive); August 25 (Sullivan, Zarzynski, two reconnaissance dives); August 26 (Sullivan, Zarzynski, two reconnaissance dives); August 30 (Bellico, Couture, John Farrell, Zarzynski, two recon-

naissance dives); and September 10 (Benway, Couture, Sullivan, Zarzynski, two reconnaissance dives).

Results

One visual sighting of a Champ-like animal was made by LCPI personnel. The sighting was made on August 10 by Patram Meaney, Martin Klein, Joseph Zarzynski, and several others aboard the *ASR 1357* vessel while towing a Klein 500-kHz side-scan sonar in approximately 150 feet of water. This marks the first time that LCPI fieldworkers have observed an unidentified animate object—possibly a Champ animal—swimming on the surface of Lake Champlain. However, due to the vessel towing electronic gear at a slow speed, and the distance from the object, no good photographic record of the sighting was recorded. Sonar records from that time are currently being examined to see if the unidentified animal was recorded by sonar. We suspect, however, that, due to the prohibitive range, no sonar contact was made.

Nonetheless, "seeing is believing," and this sighting helped to personally buoy the author's belief in the existence of a large, unknown animal or animals—dubbed Champ—in Lake Champlain. Finally, one wonders whether, had we not been restricted by technology (towing a side-scan sonar towfish transducer/cable), we might have been able to give chase and possibly obtain a better view at the unidentified animal.

LCPI divers unexpectedly discovered two previously unknown shipwrecks lying on the New York State side of Lake Champlain. The shipwreck sites have been reported to the Office of the State Archaeologist, in Albany, and a Vermont-based underwater archaeologist will attempt to identify them.

With help from Richard Deuel, LCPI is able to record one more 1987 Champ sighting not included in last year's report (Joseph W. Zarzynski, 1987, LCPI Work at Lake Champlain, 1987, *Cryptozoology,* Vol. 6: 71–77). This brings the 1987 sightings to eight. Details of the sighting follow:—about October 15, 1987: Mason Jackman and John Douville; while duck hunting at Panton, Vermont; at Kent's Bay, by Rock and Mud Islands; around 9:00 a.m.; range 200 yards; "nice, partly cloudy"; observed a 30-foot-long animal with 3–4 feet of head out of water, and 6–8 humps; sighting lasted for 1½ minutes.

The nine 1988 Champ sightings uncovered to date are listed below in chronological order (Fig. 3):

(1) June 19, 1988: Mary Jane Neale and Paul D. Damkot; near Colchester, Vermont, while sailing from Shelburne to Mallett's Bay; clear, sunny, very light wind; Neale reported seeing a head or neck of animal about two feet out of water; Damkot reported seeing 5–6 humps; sighting lasted about 30 seconds.

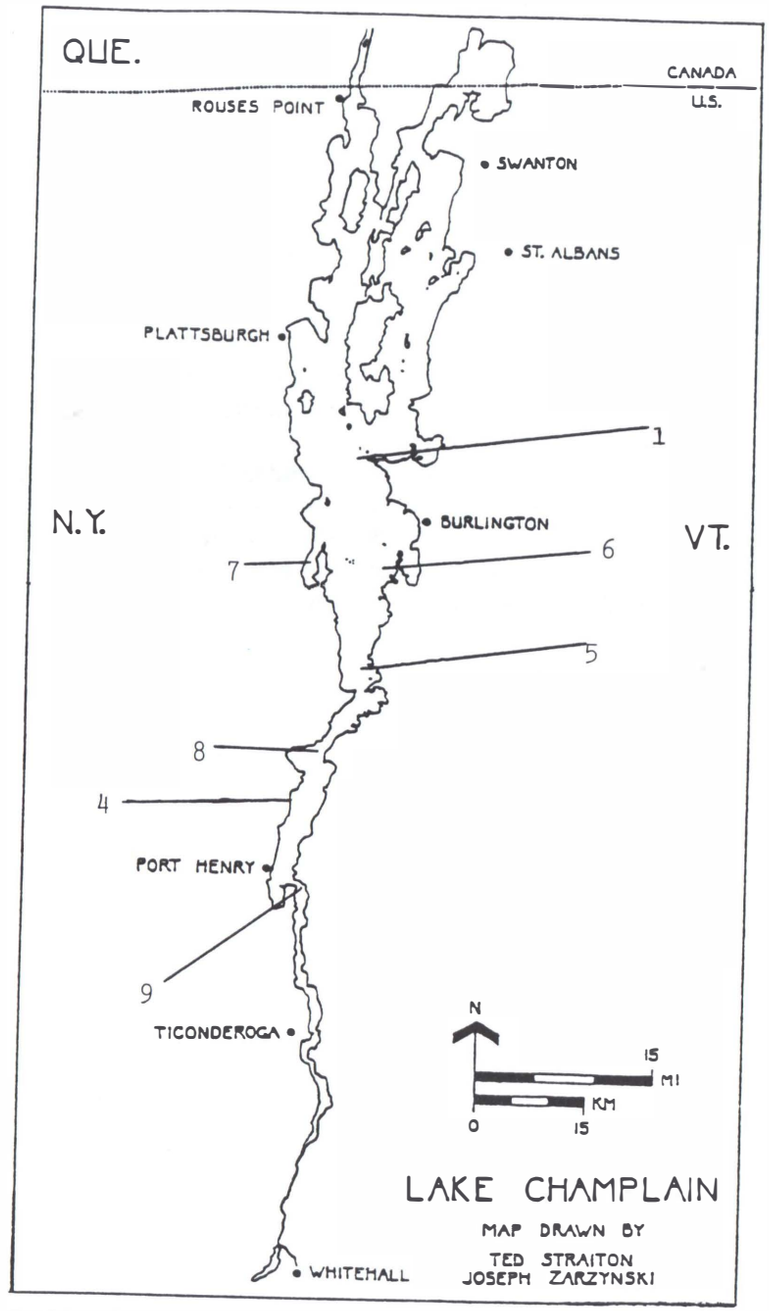

FIG. 3.—Map of Lake Champlain, with numbers indicating the locations of the eyewitness sightings logged by LCPI during 1988. Locations of sighting #2 and #3 have not yet been revealed by the witnesses.

(2) July 5, 1988: Walter, Sandra, and Heidi Tappan; location of sighting not yet provided; 7:30–8:45 p.m.; range from 600 feet to 12 feet, with an average of 100 feet; calm lake surface and clear weather; they both observed (and videotaped using a VHS camcorder) a black-colored animal or animals; "head and neck were smooth; the humps were alligator-like"; Sandra said she saw animal's head and neck.

(3) July 6, 1988: Walter, Sandra, and Heidi Tappan; location/time/conditions reported to be similar to July 5, 1988, sighting.

(4) July 17, 1988: Theresa May McCutcheon, Mrs. M. O'Neill, Mrs. J. May, and Mrs. R. Cousins; Westport, New York, south on Route 9N, approximately 2 miles from Camp Dudley; 7:30 p.m.; range ½ mile; fog/mist; flat lake surface; warm; McCutcheon saw "a large blackish-green hump . . . followed by 4 other humps"; reportedly three photographs taken using a Canon 35mm camera.

(5) August 1, 1988: Elizabeth K. Fox, Abby and Colin D. Rehkugler, Nick P. Karthaus, Bill Lockwood, and Allison Connors; at Charlotte, Vermont, town beach; around 7:00 to 8:00 p.m.; range varied according to eyewitnesses' estimate from 30 yards up to as far as ¾ of a mile; no wind; hot, clear and calm; accounts varied, but most agree two humps observed for several minutes.

(6) August 2, 1988: Judith, Harold, Dawn, and Francine Heisler; about 10 miles north of Converse Bay, Vermont; 7:30 p.m.; range 1,000 feet; very calm lake surface; clear and calm weather; while out in a boat fishing, the Heislers saw a dark-colored animal some 20–30 feet long with a head and three humps; photograph taken using a Kodak disc camera; according to Judith Heisler, "the photo doesn't show much."

(7) August 2, 1988: Jack H., Mabel, and daughter (whose name is not given) Wearstler, and George and Jackie Marshall; Willsboro Bay, New York; 8:35 p.m.; range between 100 feet and 100 yards; while boating, they "observed a very large object rise up out of the water"; 25–30 feet long, two feet in diameter; three or four segments, with one hump having "something like a fin or flipper which appeared to be lighter in color than the main part of the body"; the boat's depth-finder registered a depth of 135 feet at sighting location; sighting lasted 5 minutes.

(8) August 10, 1988: M. Patram Meaney, Martin Klein, Joseph W. Zarzynski, and several others aboard *ASR 1357* vessel; between Westport, New York, and Basin Harbor, Vermont; 6:50 p.m.; range, several hundred yards up to ½ mile; flat, calm lake surface; Meaney and Klein were the first to observe the animate object on lake surface moving away from boat, which was motoring about 3–4 knots towing a side-scan sonar towfish transducer; object black in color; no head/neck observed; object "churned" and "thrashed" on surface as it propelled itself through the water; observed with naked eye and binoculars; Meaney stated: "It moved slowly, would go down, and then surface again a little further away. It was a movement independent of the boat wakes in the area."

(9) August 31, 1988: Lee and Clayton Smith; Crown Point, New York; 12:30 p.m.; range ¼ mile; smooth lake surface; clear and sunny; Lee Smith videotaped object using a VHS recorder; animal dark grey to black in color; length estimated at 50 to 60 feet; height above lake surface 3 to 5 feet; head observed approximately 15 feet ahead of main body (one hump); it appeared "to blow water from its nostrils when surfacing."

Future Plans

LCPI intends to continue its fieldwork at Lake Champlain in 1989, again emphasizing a high technology approach to the search—underwater surveying and video digitizer computer monitoring. We hope to be able to test John Becker's VDCMS in an underwater surveillance mode to ascertain its feasibility in that environment. Vincent Capone hopes to complete his computer study, begun in 1988, of the over 300 recorded Champ sightings.

As previously proposed, the high technology approach—especially the search for a Champ carcass using side-scan sonar, a ROV, and teams of scuba divers—may best bring about the definitive evidence for Champ—a carcass. Nevertheless, LCPI does not advocate the killing of a Champ animal to secure such a specimen for scientific study. Rather, it advocates a more passive strategy, such as lake bottom searches, and encourages protection for this possible new species.